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“Their Bones Should Be Left
In the Ocean To Rot”

Notes on an Unusual Shipwreck Song

JAMES P. DELGADO



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“Their Bones Should Be Left In the Ocean To Rot”

Notes on an Unusual Shipwreck Song

JAMES P. DELGADO

The *Central America*, painted to fine
Went down like a thousand of brick,
And all the old tubs that are now on the line
Will follow her, two at a lick.

’Twould be very fine were the owners aboard,
And sink where they never would rise;
’Twould any amount of amusement afford,
And cancel a million of lies.

’Twould be very fine were the owners aboard,
And sink where they never would rise;
’Twould any amount of amusement afford,
And cancel a million of lies.

These murdering villains will ne’er be forgot,
As long as America stands;
Their bones should be left in the ocean to rot,
And their souls be at Satan’s commands.
They’ve murdered and swindled the people for years,
And never will be satisfied
Till death puts an end to their earthly careers,
Then may they with demons reside.

They’ve murdered and swindled the people for years,
And never will be satisfied
Till death puts an end to their earthly careers,
Then may they with demons reside.

The drama of shipwreck never fails to excite the imagination. Factual and fictional representations of shipwrecks have appeared in prose and print, in verse and song, and graphically through many artistic mediums. Accounts of shipwrecks were avidly read as early as 1610, and since then authors from Shakespeare to Conrad have explored the genre. In today's fast paced modern world, *ciné monde* continues to produce tales of ocean disaster with such classics as "Lifeboat," "Abandon Ship," "A Night to Remember," and the progenitor of the disaster film, "The Poseidon Adventure." Prior to the introduction of the motion picture, and in societies often unacquainted with literature, the excitement of shipwreck was broadly conveyed to the public through art and song. The lasting popularity of the song perhaps is best illustrated by the fact that as late as the mid-1970s "The Wreck of the *Edmund Fitzgerald*"® by popular Canadian songwriter/performer Gordon Lightfoot was at the top of the American pop chart. Thus it could be argued that song has conveyed the image of shipwreck to the public on a more comprehensive scale than any other medium except motion pictures. In pre-literate societies, among the illiterate subcultures of literate societies, and popularly, songs and ditties have served as storytellers, oral continuations of tradition, and as a means of social protest. Shipwreck songs are for the most part narrative in nature, usually following certain themes set for shipwreck tales in literature—fate, pathos, and heroic death.

It is suggested that an author cannot take a shipwreck story and present it without embellishment or philosophical musings. Great authors have been inspired by tales of disaster at sea, basing classical works of fiction on factual accounts of shipwreck. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* drew upon the loss of *Sea Venture* in the Bermudas in 1609, Lord Byron's *Don Juan* utilized the loss of the East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny* in 1805 and the loss of *Juno* off Arracan in 1795, and Herman Melville based much of the premise and ending of *Moby Dick* on a factual account of the whaleship *Essex*, which was stove by a whale and sank in the Pacific in 1820. Edgar

Allan Poe, in the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, used accounts of some six wrecks and two mutinies.¹ Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" was based on his first-hand experiences when the revenue steamer *Commodore* foundered off the Florida coast in January of 1897.² When a gale blew the schooner *Hesperus* into another ship at anchor, shattering her bowsprit, it inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to pen "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*." "The Wreck of the *Hesperus*" is an excellent example of fact being transmuted into romantic fiction:

It was the schooner Hesperus,
That sailed the wintry sea;
And the skipper had taken his little daughter,
To bear him company....

Then up and spake an old sailor,
Had sailed the Spanish Main;
I pray thee, put into yonder port,
For I fear a hurricane....

The breakers were right beneath her bows,
She drifted a dreary wreck,
And a whooping billow swept the crew
Like icicles from her deck....

At daybreak, on the bleak sea-beach,
A fisherman stood aghast,
To see the form of a maiden fair,
Lashed close to a drifting mast.

The salt sea was frozen on her breast,
The salt tears in her eyes;
And he saw her hair, like the brown sea-weed,
On the billows fall and rise.

Such was the wreck of the Hesperus,
In the midnight and the snow!

Christ save us all from a death like this
On the reef of Norman's Woe!³

Songs, poems, and literature are evidence of societal fascination with shipwreck and of certain aspects of the subject as interpreted by mankind. The fascination with shipwreck has

been traced to yearnings for allegorical meaning with sea disasters as symbols of man's fate, being "one of those brief instants in time when the primal isolation and helplessness of the human condition are revealed."⁴ Interest in shipwreck also flowered since it was thought that wrecks were harvests of the good who when lost were brought home to God. Additional fascination with shipwreck as a moment when the best and the worst of human nature are evident also came into play and is perhaps the most prevalent theme of interest to modern society. In the nineteenth century, all themes were emphasized, with shipwrecks bringing the faithful to God and serving as inspirations as the brave stood and calmly accepted their fate standing on the deck as the ship slipped beneath the waves, thus allowing Victorian readers or listeners the chance to vicariously suffer the perils of the sea and the honor of noble composure in the face of death.

The inspiring behavior of stoic shipwreck victims going to their death as the ill-fated vessel took its last plunge was best shown by the troops of the transport *Birkenhead* who maintained their ranks as the ship sank in shark-infested waters off Africa on February 26, 1852. Immortalized by Rudyard Kipling's poem "Soldier an' Sailor Too," the behavior of the men on the *Birkenhead* was lauded, as can be seen in the lines of the stanza:

To take your chance in the thick of a rush, with
firing all about,
Is nothing so bad when you've cover to 'and, 'an
leave an' likin' to shout;
But to stand an' be still to the Birken'ead drill
is a damn tough bullet to chew,
An' they done it, the Jollies—'Er Majesty's
Jollies—soldier an' sailor too!

Their work was done when it 'ad n't begun; they
was younger nor me an' you;
Their choice it was plain between drownin' in
'eaps an' bein' mopped by the screw,
So they stood an' was still to the Birken'ead
drill, soldier an' sailor too!⁵

Other scenes as narrated by poem or song related a romantic view of shipwreck, evoking pathetic scenes of doom as children and mothers clung to each other in the anticipation of a horrible death:

Sad at heart and resign'd, yet undaunted and brave,
They lower'd the boat a mere speck on the wave, First
enter'd the mother enfolding her child, It knew she
caress'd it look'd upwards and smiled, Cold cold was
the night as they drifted away. . . .⁶

Families separated by maritime disasters were also offered to thrill the listener or reader:

And one there shouts and wrings his hands, Amidst
the tempest, tempest wild; For there on the beach
he cannot reach, he sees his wife, his wife and
child; For on the beach he cannot reach, He sees
his wife, his wife and child. . . .⁷

And invariably the hopelessness of the situation was almost always mentioned, undoubtedly recalling the frustrations of many who had actually witnessed ships pounded to pieces on the rocky shores, unable to assist as the crews were swept to their deaths:

No human power in such an hour, the gallant bark can
save; Her mainmast gone and hurrying on, she seeks
her watery grave. Man the life boat, man the life
boat, See the dreaded signal flies; Ha! She's struck,
and from the rock despairing shouts arise.⁸

In some cases, a simple narrative was offered without implications of overwrought prose, but these were rare:

Fire in the fore-peak, fire down below;
It's fetch a bucket o' water, girls, there's fire down below.
Fire, fire, down below,
It's fetch a bucket of water, girls, there's fire down below.

Fire in the windlass, fire in the chain;
It's fetch a bucket of water, girls, and put it out again . . .
Fire up aloft, and fire down below;
It's fetch a bucket o' water girls, there's fire down below.⁹

Clearly the situation is hopeless inasmuch as the fire, which in the first stanza is in the fore-peak, spreads below and aloft.

God, as noted earlier, played an important role in the shipwreck song and in shipwreck literature, taking the responsibility for sinking ships either in retribution for spurning Him—or challenging Him:

Oh, they built the ship Titanic, to sail the
ocean blue,
And they thought they had a ship that the water
would never leak through,
But the Lord's almighty hand knew this ship would
never stand.
It was sad when that great ship went down.
Oh, it was sad, Lord, sad; oh, it was sad, Lord,
sad;
It was sad when that great ship went down, to the
bottom of the—
Husbands and wives, little children lost their
lives,
It was sad when that great ship went down.

Shipwreck songs and literature also celebrated the fact that shipwrecked souls could go home to God, hence such tunes as "The Band Played, 'Nearer My God to Thee' As the Ship Went Down." Heroism, particularly self-sacrificing heroism, was also celebrated:

On deck there is terror and agony wild, "the ship is on fire," is the ominous sound; And pleading for life hear a motherless child, "Oh, save me, do please, I don't want to be drowned." "Cling close to me, Addie," a hero replied, "I'll risk my own life little darling for thee." Then sprang with her over the ship's heated side, from merciless flames to the pitiless sea.¹⁰

The complete extinction of life in a shipwreck also brought a thrilling chill to the listener:

The church bell chimed 'til it ran twenty-nine times for each man
on the *Edmund Fitzgerald*.¹¹

In the midst of these typical shipwreck songs it is surprising, then, to find a song which neither extols bravery, evokes

pathos, or comforts the friends and families of the lost with the assurances that their departed loved ones are with God. Rather, it is a bitter missive which clearly states that human negligence was at fault, that the owners of the ship were guilty of her loss and the murder of the drowned, and that the owners needed to be drowned and "Their bones should be left in the ocean to rot...."

The song, "Loss of the *Central America*," was penned in response to the sinking of the United States Mail steamer *Central America*, which foundered off Cape Hatteras on September 12, 1857, in the midst of a wild Atlantic storm carrying with her four hundred and twenty-three souls, \$1,230,000 in gold, and tons of freight, baggage, and mail.¹² As news of the disaster reached New York and then the rest of the country, howls of rage and indignation arose as it was disclosed that the vessel had been unseaworthy with rotten frames, leaky planking, and a sprung bottom. Her culpable owners had sent her out rather than incur the costs of repair. The ship, unable to weather the storm, had sunk with a disorganized and unprepared crew. In San Francisco, where most of the lost passengers had lived, the cold fury of the press was matched only by that of the populace:

Wherever we went, at every turn, we heard the query put, "Who is responsible for the murder of four hundred of California's worthy citizens?" Ay, who is responsible for their murder? For murder it is, most foul. . . . We answer, unhesitatingly, the United States Mail Company . . . and their coadjutors, the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. To the cupidity and heartless inhumanity of these unchristian companies is to be attributed the recent disaster. What care they for the many children made fatherless, or for the wives suddenly thrown upon the cold, heartless world, and the poor, unprotected widows, by the foundering of their rickety, filthy old hulk....¹³

Controversy over the wreck raged in San Francisco for over a month. As the press published lurid accounts of the disaster and survivor accounts which hinted that cowardice on the part of the crew, a lack of tools to repair damage to the *Central America* done by the storm, and an unseaworthy rotten vessel

had combined to send over four hundred innocent citizens to a watery grave, old complaints were recalled. The United States Mail Steamship Company and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which had carried the bulk of the seaborne migration to California via the Isthmus of Panama since 1849, were viewed as monopolies as opposition steamship lines failed or were drawn within the fold by the two larger companies. Complaints of high fares, rotten food, poor service, uncaring crews, and poorly maintained vessels, whether true or false, had instilled a strong belief that the two steamship companies were operated by swindlers and were "obstacles to immigration":

All that California needed to make her a great and prosperous state, was a population. With people enough to fill our valleys, and to develop the immense mineral resources of our state, we will be placed in a position where we will have nothing to ask, self-dependent, and self-reliant. . . . Heretofore, we have been dependent entirely upon the steamship companies for the emigration to this state. . . .¹⁴

To many San Franciscans before the disaster the steamship companies had unfairly limited migration, took little care of their passengers or their vessels, and were a "heartless monopoly." After the loss of the *Central America*, testimonials by shipwrights who had repaired company vessels which stated that an overhaul "consisted only of a little paint, putty, and a love of champagne"¹⁵ and testimony by *Central America* survivors like John Dement, who reported that

The steamer was leaking around the lower portholes or "dead lights," which might have been tight at first, but as they were badly rust eaten, or surrounded by verdigris between them and the wood, they had often been covered with paint, etc., they early began to let in water. . . .¹⁶

only increased the vehemence of the public's reaction.

Editorials demanding action, angry public meetings, sermons, and other proddings resulted in three responses; a fictional tale of a visit to a drowned steamer was inspired by the disaster and a poem entitled "The Lost Four Hundred" offered a traditional, fatalistic literary response:

Ah! Stormy was the day
And wildly flew the spray,
 O'er the deck;
As the straining, leaking ship,
On her last fatal trip,
 Sank a wreck . . .

Man the boats, a vessel's near!
Now, my hearts, be of cheer,
 And our wives,
And our children let us save,
From the fierce, drowning wave,
 For our lives!

Hurrah, they're safe at last!
Half the fear of death has passed—
 We are strong;
Though the leak gains on us fast,
And more furious wails the blast
 Its death song.

The night has closed all round,
And no human sight or sound
 Can we hear;
When with trembling heave and dip,
Down, stern-foremost sinks our ship—
 Oh! The fear!

Such a hollow in the wave,
As she rushes to her grave,
 Down below;
With five hundred noble lives—
Husbands thinking of their wives,
 As they go!

And the boiling waves close o'er,
As she sinks amidst the roar—
 All is lost!
No! Like resurrected men,
Some come up to life again,
 And are tossed—

All that long, that hopeless night,
In that darkness without light,
 By the waves;
Till a ship came sailing by,

And her captain heard us cry
From our graves.

Half a hundred thus gained life,
Though all night in awful strife
With grim death.

But the rest no more shall know
Aught of happiness or woe,
In the depth.

Toll sadly, solemn bell;
Linger long thy sorrowing knell
For the dead.

Still from shore to distant shore
Shall the tears of mourners pour,
Sadly shed.

Peace to the noble souls,
O'er whom old ocean rolls,
Ever more!

Calm as an infant's bed,
Lie the four hundred dead,
Gone before.¹⁷

When the nature and character of San Francisco's response to the sinking of the *Central America* is assessed, it becomes apparent that a fatalistic acceptance as implied in "The Lost Four Hundred" was not a widespread public reaction. On October 30, 1857, a mass meeting was held in San Francisco to pass resolutions indicating San Francisco's feelings about the disaster. It was not a circumspect group:

. . . this meeting attributes the loss of the *Central America* to the negligence and indifference of the U.S. Mail Steamship Company to the safety of those whose money it had received . . . we view such negligence as falling a little short of crime.¹⁸

In light of this it would seem that the angry invective of the "Loss of the *Central America*" was and is more indicative of San Francisco's reaction to the shipwreck. Additionally, the author of the song, John A. Stone, had long been a critic of the steamship companies. Stone, who had arrived in California in 1850, penned many songs of the Gold Rush State, always striving to hold "the mirror up to nature," and "if the *reflec-*

tions to some may seem harsh, I have only to say that . . . recognition of their truthfulness has incited me. . . .”¹⁹

Many popular songs of the Gold Rush were parodies exploding the myths of that time and place, illustrating “the humor and drudgery of mining, the hopes of and disillusionment of the miners, the hardships and humbugs of life in California. . . .”²⁰ The attitude of the songwriter when turned to obvious inequities such as the overcrowded berths, bad food, rude crews, and poorly maintained vessels resulted in “humbug” songs such as Stone’s “A Ripping Trip,” which began

You go aboard of a leaky boat,
And sail for San Francisco;
You've got to pump to keep her afloat,
You have *that*, by jingo.
The engine soon begins to squeak,
But nary a thing to oil her;
Impossible to stop the leak—
Rip goes the boiler!²¹

Stone also penned “Humbug Steamship Companies,” which clearly reflected a prevalent California attitude about the steamship companies, a reputation which although actually not deserved in many cases stood them in bad stead when the *Central America* was lost:

The greatest imposition
that the public ever saw,
Are the California steamships
that run to Panama;
They're a perfect set of robbers
and accomplish their designs,
By a general invitation
of the people to the mines.

Then come along, come along,
You that want to go,
The best accommodations,
and the passage very low;
Our boats they are large enough,
don't be afraid,
The *Golden Gate* is going down
to beat the *Yankee Blade*.

. . .

When you start from San Francisco,
 they treat you like a dog,
 The victuals you're compelled to eat,
 ain't fit to feed a hog,
 And a drunken mate-a-cursing
 And damning you around,
 And wishing that the boat would sink,
 and everyone be drowned.

(Chorus)

The captain goes to dinner
 and begins to curse the waiter,
 Knocks him out of hearing
 With a thundering big potato;
 The cabin maid, half-crazy,
 breaks the meat dish all to smash,
 And the steward comes a-running
 with a plate of mouldy hash.

(Chorus)

You are driven round the steerage
 like a drove of hungry swine,
 And kicked ashore at Panama,
 by the Independent Line;
 Your baggage is thrown overboard,
 the like you never saw,
 A trip or two will sicken you
 of going to Panama.²²

Stone's predisposition to write unflattering songs about the "steam navigation thieves" and the widespread anger felt by the man on the street in San Francisco culminated in an angry ditty about the loss of the *Central America*. The feelings of the time are repeated almost verbatim in the song; overhaulings consisting of "paint, putty, and a love of champagne" are recalled in the line stating that the *Central America*, "painted so fine, went down like a thousand of brick"; the suspicion that most if not all of the steamers operating on the Panama Route were also rotten, unseaworthy hulks can be seen in the dire prophecy that "all the old tubs that are now on the line, Will follow her, two at a lick." The popular image of the owners

reached consensus in the line "They've murdered and swindled the people for years." Thus, the tenor of this unusual shipwreck song, which so dramatically departs from the genre, easily offers a hate-filled response to the sinking of the *Central America*:

'Twould be very fine were the owners aboard,
And sink where they never would rise;

'Twould any amount of amusement afford,
And cancel a million of lies . . .

Their bones should be left in the ocean to rot,
And their souls be at Satan's commands.

The "Loss of the *Central America*" is not a standard parlor offering of romantic views of shipwreck replete with pathos, heroics, and fatalism; rather it is symbol of a rousing from complacent acceptance of disaster, a resolution to protect innocent humanity from human error as well as a vivid reflection and integral part of San Francisco's vehement reaction to a disaster that should not have happened.



JAMES DELGADO is Park Historian for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

NOTES

The gracious advice, support, and assistance of Corinne Swall of the Mother Lode Troupe, Michael Keller and Anne Basart of the University of California at Berkeley's Music Library, G. Douglass Nadeau of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Jonathan Middlebrook of San Francisco State University, and Robert J. Schwendinger of the Maritime Humanities Center are gratefully acknowledged.

An earlier version of this paper was read at the Fourth Annual Symposium on Traditional Music of the Sea at Mystic Seaport Museum, Connecticut, in July of 1983.

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2. Stephen Crane, *Stories and Tales*. Edited by Robert Wooster Stallman. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952).
3. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Evangeline and Selected Poems and Tales*. (New York: New American Library, 1964) pp. 33–36 *passim*.
4. George P. Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconology, 1750 to Present*. (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1982).
5. Rudyard Kipling, *Collected Verse*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1907), pp. 305–307 *passim*.
6. Charles MacKay and Henry Russell, *The Ship on Fire, A Descriptive Scene*. (Boston: Oliver Ditson, n.d.).
7. Henry Russell and Mrs. Crawford, *Man the Life Boat! A Descriptive Song*. (New York: William Hall & Son, n.d.).
8. *ibid.*
9. Sir Richard Terry, as quoted in W. M. Watt, *Fire Down Below: The Story of the Loss of the "Cartburn" Clipper*. (London: Frederick Muller, Ltd., 1935).
10. Frank Soule and P. R. Nicholls, *I Do Not Wish to be Drowned: A Song Respectfully Dedicated to the Survivors of the Wreck of the Golden Gate*. (San Francisco: Charles F. Robbins & Co., 1862).
11. Gordon Lightfoot, “The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald”® from the Album “Summertime Dream”® Moose Music-CAPAC, Warner Brothers Records, Inc., 1976.
12. The history of the *Central America*, ex *George Law* is related in Cedric Ridgely-Nevitt, “The United States Mail Steamer *George Law*,” *American Neptune*, 4:30 (October 1944) :305–307 and in John Haskell Kemble,

The Panama Route, 1848-1869 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1943). An excellent scholarly account of the loss of the *Central America* is E. Merton Coulter, "The Loss of the Steamship Central America off the Coast of Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 54:4 (Winter 1970):453-492. San Francisco's reaction to the disaster is explored in James P. Delgado, "Murder Most Foul: San Francisco Reacts to the Loss of the S.S. *Central America*," *The Log of Mystic Seaport*, 35:4 (Spring 1983):3-15.

13. San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, September 23, 1857, page 3.
14. San Francisco *Daily Alta California*, September 22, 1857, page 2.
15. San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, November 10, 1857, page 3.
16. Dement related his tale during a return voyage to California on the S.S. *John L. Stephens* to fellow passenger H. D. Barrows. Barrows published the account after presenting it to the Historical Society of Southern California at their meeting of December 6, 1896. It was published as "The Foundering of the Steamship *Central America*" in the *Annual Publication of the Historical Society of Southern California and Pioneer Register*, Volume 4 (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1898), pp. 70-75.
17. San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, October 24, 1857, page 3.
18. San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, November 2, 1857, page 2.
19. John A. Stone, *Put's Golden Songster*. (San Francisco: D. Appleton & Co., 1858).
20. Richard A. Dwyer and Richard E. Lingenfelter, Editors, *The Songs of The Gold Rush*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), p. 2. Also see Sister Mary Dominic Ray, O.P.'s introduction to Mart Taylor, *The Gold Digger's Song Book, Containing the Most Popular Humorous & Sentimental Songs . . .* (Marysville: Marysville Herald Print, 1856). Reprint Edition 1975, Book Club of California, San Francisco.
21. Cornel Lengyel, Editor, *Music of the Gold Rush Era* (W.P.A. History of Music Project, Volume II) (San Francisco: Works Progress Administration, Northern California, 1939), pp. 70-71.
22. *Ibid.*

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The Annual Meeting of The Book Club of California will be held in the Club rooms, 312 Sutter Street, San Francisco, on Tuesday, March 20, 1984, at 12:00 noon. Please give us a call at (415) 781-7532, if you plan to attend.

Gifts & Acquisitions

Club member Tyrus G. Harmsen, College Librarian at Occidental College, has just sent the Club a noteworthy example of his own private press, a small booklet entitled *Una and Robinson Jeffers: Two Early Letters*. This is the second of Ty's printing efforts at his Tiger Press. It is dedicated to the memory of his mentor in printing, Andrew H. Horn, and we cannot help but think that Andy Horn would be pleased not only for the kind thought but by the resulting job of printing done by his well-trained student. This is an unusually well designed and thought-out piece of printing and, on the whole, well printed on an 8 x 12 Chandler & Price, formerly used at the Castle Press. Ty writes that once he gains more experience, it is his intention, "that this press will join with the ranks of other college bibliographical presses, and its use will be an option for graphics students in the Art Department of the College." This is a noble plan and its success, we feel, is assured if for no other reason than the demonstrated ability of this remarkable second effort of the Tiger Press. The Club is pleased to house this example of private press printing in their collection of Western Fine Printing.

From an anonymous donor, the Club has received an unusual example of early stereotyping. The book is not the earliest example of Didot's work in duplicate-type printing, but its main point of interest is its original, unsophisticated condition. *Oeuvres de Boileau Despreaux*, Pierre Didot, Paris 1813 in original wrappers with pasted label on the spine, is not in perfect condition, but this copy was shown as an example of early stereotyping in the San Francisco World's Fair exhibition in 1939. This rarity will join our growing collection on stereotyping.

Members Elizabeth and Chauncey D. Leake, Jr. have sent us the announcement and the catalogue of books they loaned to the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas. The title for that exhibition was *San Francisco Books, 1902-1978*, and honored Chauncey's father, the notable San Francisco collector and University of California medical professor.

From Leonard F. Bahr at his Adagio Press at Harper Woods, Michigan, we have received his *William Blake, Proverbs of Hell*, number 76, signed by the printer, of an edition of "approximately 200 copies." Together with this example of Bahr's private press printing, he has included his *Status Report*, 1983, being the second of his work for the year at his after-hour activity. The Club is delighted to have these examples of Adagio and they will be housed with examples of his work on file.

From W. Thomas Taylor, bookseller and Member, the Club has acquired two of his recent publications. *Doves Press: The Start of a Worry* is edited with an introduction by Colin Franklin and a foreword by Michael Hornby. Although the destruction of the Doves types and matrices by Cobden-Sanderson has been told many times, this new work reproduces the newly discovered correspondence between C-S and St. John Hornby, Sidney Cockerell, and Emery Walker, correspondence that had been tucked away in Hornby's cupboard and long forgotten. This does bring a new light to the circumstances and to C-S's "justification" for his actions . . . in spite of some bewildering responses of his associates. The book was printed for the publisher by the Bird & Bull Press at \$65. plus shipping and tax. The second book acquired from W. Thomas Taylor is *Doors of Perception*, three essays on book typography by Harry Duncan printed for the publisher by Carol J. Blinn at her Warwick Press, Daniel Keleher pressman. This book is handsomely cased in quarter Niger goatskin, with leather corners with paste papers made by Carol Blinn. There are 315 copies, 300 for sale. Each copy is signed by Harry Duncan. The price is \$150. plus shipping.

From Barbara Land, the Club's "full-time-part-time worker" and generous donor to the Library, the Club has been given two interesting works for our reference collection. The first is a reprint of three monographs originally produced in three pamphlets and now assembled in one book: *The Iron Press in America*, printed originally in an edition of 160 copies; *A History of the Platen Press Jobber*, printed for Mr. Green by Philip Reed in Chicago in an edition of 495 copies (the Club owns a copy of this original edition); and *On Making a Printing Press* which Green issued in 170 copies.

This collection, assembled and printed in one book by Ye Olde Printery in Cincinnati in 1981, is an important addition to our research library. The second book from Barbara is the original edition of Ernest Lehner's *Alphabets & Ornaments*, published by the World Publishing Co. in 1952. This is a useful reference work on ornaments in printing and engraved border decorations, as well as a period work on calligraphy and types. We are grateful to dear Barbara.

Member Dr. Edmund E. Simpson, who is the proprietor of the Blackwood Press in Placerville, has sent the Club another charming example of his private press work, his *Common Place Book*, printed in an edition of 195 copies. In our last review of Dr. Simpson's printing, we commented on his new-found ability as an illustrator and lino-block cutter. This new work now puts the good doctor in the position of an expert in this field. All of the decorations, except those composed in type ornament, were professionally designed, cut, and printed as well. Our only tongue-in-cheek criticism concerns his over-hang paper covers which tend to break down when stacked with books on a shelf. We are tempted to trim the covers flush—and we may. Our congratulations and thanks to Dr. Simpson.

Speaking of commonplace books, the Club has just acquired a copy of the Harrison of Paris *Typographical Commonplace Book*, 1932, copy 404 of 595. This noteworthy book, a tour de force on the part of Monroe Wheeler the printer and designer, and Glenway Wescott, was one of the earliest examples of the compiling of amusing extracts and typographical "play." If not the true first it is the one that set the stage typographically for the throng of typographic commonplace books that followed the lead of this delightful volume.

Member Harold Berliner, printer and typefounder in Nevada City, California, has sent his latest catalogue, which he prefers to call "a listing," of all the matrices he has for casting. Obviously is isn't practical to maintain a stock of all of his astonishing selection of types for printers—but along with this "listing" is an insert on *Special Casting*—types which can be furnished in Didot sizes and with special spacing material. And in this insert, Berliner shows his latest typeface, *Glagolithic*, a north Dalmatian typeface, as well as Times Roman in 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ point for those printers interested especially in printing miniature books.

William Beatty, whose outstanding collection on historical papermaking the Club has had the pleasure of showing twice, has presented the Club with a copy of an unusual book, *The Song of Magdalen* by Alice Orcott and printed on handmade paper, made by the printer Douglass Howell in 1946. (The two ss' in his name is correct!) Although the colophon reads one of 500 copies (ours is numbered 39), the printer in a typed note writes: "Five hundred copies is incorrect. More like 39 copies would be closer to the truth." Our thanks to William Beatty for the addition of this unusual book to our fine collection on the topic of handmade paper.

The Club has received a copy of *The Mystique of Printing*, the catalogue of Ward Ritchie's "Half Century of Books" exhibition. The exhibition

was put together to celebrate the opening of the new public library in San Juan Capistrano, and was printed by Richard Hoffman after a design by Ritchie; there is a "By Way of a Foreword" by Lawrence Clark Powell.

From Toni Savage, our Leicester friend in England, we have received his usual group of ephemeral printing, including keepsakes now reaching number 235, and the Club owns every one of them! With this delightful clutch of Savagiana, he includes two pieces from the Mole Press, Huddersfield, and two from Hans van Eijk at Bonnefant. One is noted: "Printed and sold by Hans van Eijk at the Sign of Ye Good-Child in Bandolt." These new press names may well be "new" but we suspect that these examples are another of Toni's *alter egos* (?). We, of course, are delighted always to have these amusing examples of his after-hours printing—and with it all, he has included a full color reproduction of a painting by his friend Rigby Graham of the Schloss Wyher in Switzerland.

ALBERT SPERISEN

A miniature but quite operable hand press made by our late Member, Valenti Angelo, has been presented to The Book Club of California by his daughter and son-in-law, Valdine and John Plasmati of Sayville, New York.

The press is on display now in the bookcase along the west wall of the Club, where it can be viewed by Valenti's legion of friends and others interested.

According to his family, Valenti made the press in the late nineteen sixties while he was still residing in Bronxville, N.Y. His son-in-law, John, was then employed as librarian at Grumman Aviation and brought home to Valenti odd pieces of metal, mostly aluminum, from the plant's scrap piles.

These metal scraps intrigued Valenti and from them he fashioned several small, operating hand presses, of which the Club's press was the very smallest. It stands about 8" high overall, 3" wide and 7" long.

The bed moves freely back and forth and there is a working, hinged tympan at one end. A small type-high metal form is locked up on the bed. It consists of the initials V and A on either side of a small cut of an old iron hand press. A perfectly-clear printed impression of the form rests on the tympan. The platen is actuated by a wood handled bar attached to an eccentric cam that lowers the platen. A return spring lifts it. Capping it all off is a lovely little brass finial in the form of the figure of the Winged Victory holding a tiny laurel wreath; all very fetching! Come see for yourselves.

The Club is deeply indebted to Valdine and John Plasmati for this fine memento of Valenti Angelo, crafted entirely by his imagination and gifted hands.

ALAN DIETCH

We wish to extend our appreciation to member Daniel G. Volkmann, Jr. for his donation to the Club in memory of Warren R. Howell.

Our thanks to Msgr. Francis J. Weber for presenting the Club with a copy of his miniature book, *The XXIII Olympiad*, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the first celebration of the Olympic Games in Los Angeles. Designed by Francis Braun, this timely little volume was printed by the Junipero Serra Press in an edition of 350 copies.

Our thanks to our former director and accomplished hand bookbinder Gale Herrick for his thoughtfulness in sponsoring the acquisition of Timothy Barrett's *Japanese Papermaking*, a most appropriate addition to the Club's holdings on the art of the book.

We very much appreciate Laurence J. Ryan's gift to the Club of the 1983 reprint of *Historic California in Bookplates*, written in 1936 by his sister, Clare Ryan Talbot.

Book Review

Cawdor, by Robinson Jeffers. Covelo, California: The Yolla Bolly Press, 1983. With an Afterword by James D. Houston, and woodblock illustrations by Mark Livingston.

The Yolla Bolly Press of Covelo, California has just issued the first of their "California Writers of the Land" series with a de luxe edition of Robinson Jeffers' book-length narrative poem *Cawdor*. This handsome folio is elegantly bound with the spine in Oasis Morocco leather stamped in gold and the boards covered in Amish horse denim, blind-stamped, all housed in a stout protective slipcase. James D. Houston, author of many books and currently a lecturer in creative writing at University of California Santa Cruz, has contributed a long afterword. Mr. Houston is also the consulting editor for the series, which will consist of four volumes. This noteworthy edition has been illustrated by Mark Livingston with four hand-crafted wood cuts and sixteen calligraphic chapter openings, all cut in fruitwood side-grain planks reflecting the rugged quality of the poem. The printer has deliberately printed these side-grained plank cuts

to emphasize the very character and nature of the wood itself. Mr. Livingston is a noted graphic artist who has worked on the making of fine books with several of the finest printers in America.

ALBERT SPERISEN

Publication Notice

For Spring 1984, the Club will issue the first publication of a new series entitled "Literary Profiles" which deals with authors whose contributions to the literary scene of the American West have been significant but largely uncelebrated. Many critical and biographical studies have been devoted to major Western writers—Jack London, Frank Norris, John Steinbeck, Robinson Jeffers. Less well-known authors have been neglected. The purpose of the Profile series is to present such authors, who enjoyed considerable popularity during their lifetimes, to a new readership.

Volumes in the series will be of uniform format—octavo, approximately fifteen thousand words, and containing a bibliography or selective checklist of the subject's published works as well as illustrative material.

The first Profile, *Benjamin C. Truman: California Booster and Bon Vivant*, written by Gary F. Kurutz and printed by Sherwood Grover, is scheduled to appear in May of this year. Profiles of Charles Nordhoff and Idwal Jones are slated for 1985 and 1986. Other subjects under consideration for a Literary Profile include Clarkson Crane, J. Smeaton Chase, Frank Pixley, and George Horton James. Members are encouraged to comment on this new aspect of the Club's publication program and suggestions for future Profiles are welcome.

THE PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE

Serendipity

About twenty-five members of the Club traveled to Sacramento on Sunday, January 15, to attend the opening of an exhibition of the work of Ward Ritchie which had come from San Juan Capistrano and will later go to the Sutro Library. Some 118 specimens of his work as poet, author, designer, or printer and various combinations thereof are on display in the California Room of the State Library. Ward came from Los Angeles especially for the occasion and the exhibition is a handsome one, additionally enhanced by a catalogue designed by Ward, of course.

In a second part of the program, Mrs. Lillian Marks figuratively unveiled the Albion Super Royal hand press once used by the Plantin Press which was recently purchased by the California State Library Foundation from me, as I had purchased the press from Mrs. Marks. State Librarian Gary Strong introduced Muir Dawson who spoke briefly on fine printing in Southern California, particularly the Plantin Press of Saul and Lillian Marks. Mrs. Marks then delivered a few remarks about her late husband and their work at the press. Saul's very last job, which he did not live to see completed, was the Book Club's publication *Four Lectures by T. J. Cobden-Sanderson* edited by John Dreyfus, 1974. Mr. Dreyfus has described Saul and Lillian Marks as the finest printers in America.

The ceremonies were culminated by the presentation of handsome framed Certificates of Award Resolutions of the California State Legislature honoring both Ward Ritchie and Lillian Marks and the Plantin Press for their great contributions to California fine printing over the many years of their creative endeavors.

ALAN DIETCH

Some of our Members will want to know that The School of Library Service, Columbia University, has published the *Proceedings of The Fine Printing Conference* held at Columbia in May of 1982. The invitational conference brought together more than sixty prominent North American private press printers who addressed various topics of interest. The 128-page softcover book is organized into chapters on Paper, Bookbinding, Ink, and Type. It is \$10 and may be ordered from the Publications Clerk, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

Terry Belanger, on the strength of the enormous success of the first one, has organized a second Rare Book School for the Summer of 1984 at Columbia University. Twenty week-long courses will be given during July and August. A distinguished faculty has been assembled and features such luminaries as Nicolas Barker, Alexandra Mason, Ruth Mortimer, Paul Needham, and Wilman Spawn, among others. For further information or applications write to Rare Book School, School of Library Service, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027.

D. STEVEN COREY

The Frederick Ullmer firm of London which recently began manufacturing new Albion hand presses has appointed Mr. E. A. Lindner of the E. G. Lindner Co. Ltd, 612 East Twelfth St., Los Angeles, CA 90015, as their agent. Inquiries are welcomed.

We are saddened by the recent deaths of three prominent and long-time Members: Mrs. Martin S. Mitau in November, Mr. Amadeo R. "Tommy" Tommasini in December, and Mr. Warren R. Howell on January 11, 1984.

Mrs. Mitau's husband was a well-known book collector and a long-time Director of the Club.

Mr. Tommasini had a distinguished career as head of the University of California Press. He was noted particularly for his heroic efforts in quickly and successfully printing the Charter of the United Nations when it was founded in San Francisco in 1945 and he was known by many for his annual Christmas keepsakes.

Mr. Howell was one of the nation's great booksellers and his lifelong involvement with books extended in many generous ways to the Book Club. He was a Director for many years and was a past President. A memorial keepsake honoring Warren is planned and will be mailed separately to the membership.

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325 copies, signed by the author, have been designed by Carol Blinn at the Warwick Press, and printed by Daniel Keleher. The paper is Frankfurt Cream, the type Perpetua, and the edition has been hand-bound in quarter Niger goat-skin with paste papers hand-made by Ms Blinn. 6 x 9 in., 99 p. \$150.

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